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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether minority participation in high school journalism is lower than participation by White students. Past research has found that participation on high school newspapers is often the catalyst that leads to journalism careers. The study used a telephone questionnaire as the survey instrument. Maryland high schools (160) were selected to provide data for the Maryland Scholastic Press Association, since the state roughly reflects the racial breakdown of the nation (29.4% minority population), with a diverse demographic mix. Of the 137 schools which had newspapers, the adviser was then contacted and interviewed, with a response rate of 76.6%. Results indicated that 85.6% of all 160 non-vocational, non-special needs Maryland public schools published newspapers, including 110 (91.7%) of the 120 White plurality schools as opposed to 27 (67.5%) of the 40 Black plurality schools. Results also indicated that the mean number of pages was 84.8 at the former and 70.2 at the latter. Newspaper leadership in schools with a 69.7% White population was held 80% by White students and, conversely, Blacks made up 22.3% of the student population, but only held 14.2% of the top newspaper positions. Findings revealed that only 3.8% of advisers surveyed were minorities and only 8.6% majored in journalism, with 60% never having taken a journalism course. Findings also revealed that 45% of all American daily newspapers do not have minorities on their staffs. (Contains 2 tables of data and 27 references.) (CR)

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RACE AS A FACTOR IN STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN HIGH SCHOOL JOURNALISM

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RACE AS A FACTOR IN STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN H.S. JOURNALISM

ABSTRACT: Past research has found that participation on high school newspapers is often the catalyst that leads to journalism careers. This study explores whether minority participation in high school journalism is lower than participation by white students, a condition that would reduce the pool of potential professional minority journalists. The study found that race was a predictor in both whether a school had a newspaper and which students were leaders of the publications.

Introduction

In 1978, the U.S. newspaper industry set an ambitious goal of creating newsrooms that reflect the racial diversity of the country before the year 2000.[1] Since the American Society of Newspaper Editors launched its Year 2000 strategy, the percentage of minority journalists has inched upward each year, from 4 percent in 1978 to 10.5 percent in 1994.[2] But the proportion of minorities in the overall population has gone up at the same time, from 17 percent in 1978 to 26 percent in 1994. And the Census Bureau projects that minorities will make up more than 28 percent of the U.S. population by the turn of the century.[3] With less than four years to go, it seems likely the newspaper industry will fall far short of its racial parity goal. In fact, the industry is doing little more than keeping up with the growth of diversity in the country. (See Figure 1 and Table 1)

FIGURE 1
Comparison of Minorities in U.S. Population
to
Minorities in U.S. Newsrooms (1980-1994)

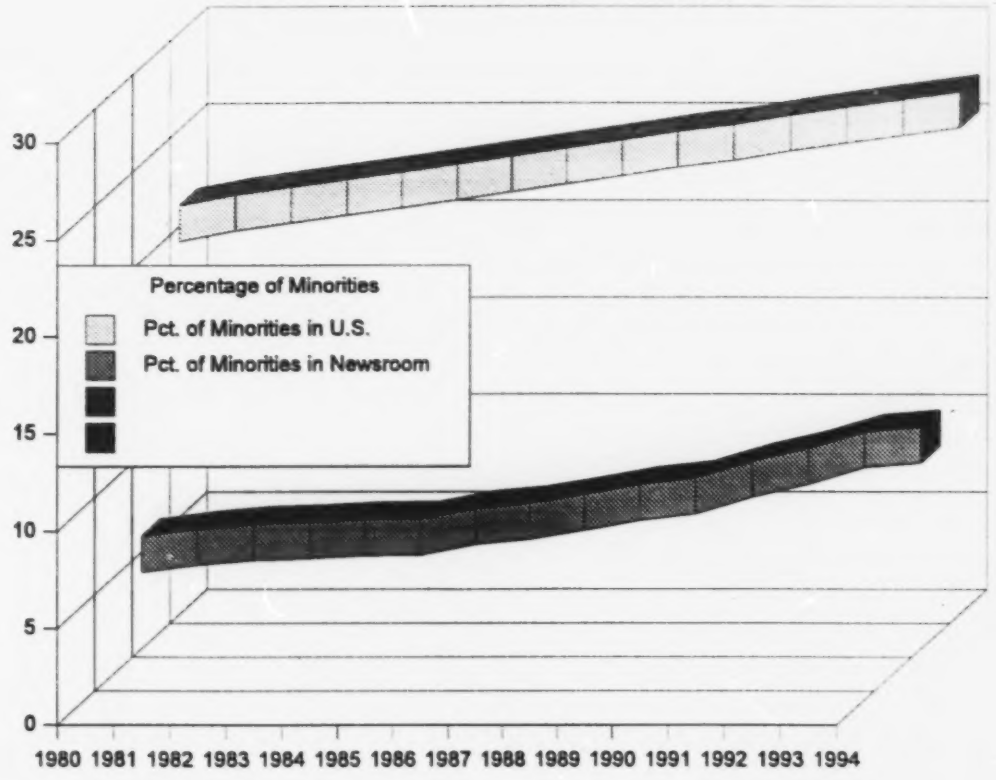

TABLE 1: Comparison of Minorities in U.S. Population to Minorities in U.S. Newsrooms (1980-1994; 2000 projections)

YEAR	*Percentage of Minorities in U.S.*	*Percentage of Minorities/Newsroom*
1980	*20.15*	*4.89*
1981	*20.70*	*5.27*
1982	*21.10*	*5.51*
1983	*21.49*	*5.60*
1984	*21.87*	*5.75*
1985	*22.27*	*5.76*
1986	*22.68*	*6.30*
1987	*23.09*	*6.56*
1988	*23.51*	*7.02*
1989	*23.95*	*7.54*
1990	*24.29*	*7.86*
1991	*24.78*	*8.72*
1992	*25.20*	*9.39*
1993	*25.60*	*10.25*
1994	*26.00*	*10.49*
2000 (projected)	*(28.37)*	*(12.89)*

(source: U.S. Census Bureau and American Society of Newspaper Editors)

This failure comes despite aggressive minority recruitment programs at some of the nation's largest and most influential newspaper companies. Many of these programs are aimed at the professional level through minority-targeted training programs, job fairs, direct recruiting and retention programs. Others focus on minority-based scholarships and internships for college students. Few newspaper diversity programs, however, target high school students. Yet there is substantial research literature that indicates participation in high school newspapers is a major factor in a student's decision to become a professional journalist. And other studies show that most people make their career choices before they get to college.

This study looks at high school newspapers to probe whether there are racial inequities at the high school newsroom level that could be hindering the industry's diversity goals by reducing the natural pool of potential professional journalists. The study proposes two research questions:

* Is the racial makeup of high schools an indicator of whether a school will have a newspaper?

* Is race a factor in which students run high school publications?

Literature Review

The study of high school journalism reaches back to the beginnings of mass communication research. Grant Hyde wrote about scholastic journalism in the second ever issue of The Journalism Bulletin (later Journalism Quarterly) more than 70 years ago, noting "the amazingly rapid growth and spread of the teaching of `something like journalism' in high schools throughout the country."[4] But despite the deep-rooted history, the body of literature that has developed on high school journalism is rather thin, especially on the linkage between high school

newspapers and race.

Arnold reported in 1993 that there was "no research on the plight of the inner city school."[5] Her study of inner city high schools showed 85 percent of the schools surveyed had newspapers. But that study was conducted largely by mail questionnaires to school principals. The response rate was 55.8 percent of the 267 selected in a random sample.[6] There was, however, a strong possibility of a response bias since principals at schools without newspapers might have been less likely to fill out a questionnaire about the topic of high school newspapers.

There is little research even on the general question of how many U.S. high schools have newspapers. Dvorak found that 83.1 percent of U.S. high schools surveyed have newspapers or newsmagazines.[7] But the mail questionnaire, addressed to "journalism educator," also seems subject to a strong response bias for schools without a "journalism educator." The response rate was 44 percent.

Taken together, the Dvorak and Arnold studies suggest no difference between inner-city high schools and high schools in general.

The research literature on the association between high school newspapers and the profession is much richer. The most significant work was done in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when researchers were concerned about the under-enrollment of journalism schools and the dominance of high school newspapers by female students. In Weigle's survey of college freshmen who were high school newspaper editors, 10 percent said they planned to enter professional journalism.[8] Lubell's survey of 1,089 high school delegates attending a national scholastic press convention found that 29 percent were considering "some form of journalism or writing" career, and another 10 percent remained undecided.[9] Kimball and Lubell's follow up

study of 1,500 high school student journalists attending four scholastic press conventions found that journalism was the top career choice of boys (20 percent) and the second choice of girls (22 percent; teaching was 31 percent).[10]

Cranford found that participation in the high school newspaper was the most often cited reason why 66 University of Nebraska students enrolled in journalism.[11] Similarly, Fosdick and Greenberg found that participation in high school publications was the most prevalent single factor cited by University of Wisconsin journalism students for majoring in journalism.[12]

More recent research has found the link between high school newspapers and the profession remains strong. Dodd, Tipton and Sumpter found that 63 percent of University of Florida journalism majors worked on their high school newspaper, and 21 percent cited the newspaper or publication adviser as the most significant influence on their decision to major in communications.[13]

Most of the studies looked at either high school journalists' aspirations or the influence of high school newspaper work on choice of college major. Little research has been conducted with the equation reversed - looking at contemporary professional journalists to measure the effect of high school journalism on their career choice. Neither Weaver and Wilhoit[14] nor Johnstone, et al.[15] looked at high school newspaper experience in their major studies of the backgrounds of U.S. journalists. An exception was a questionnaire mailed to 75 professional editors by Forrester. Of the 52 respondents, 35 said their high school journalistic experience influenced their career choice.[16] A larger study by the American Society of Newspaper Editors revealed that 55 percent of the 1,210 working journalists surveyed from 72 newspapers worked on high school publications.[17]

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Getting students interested in journalism while they are still in high school is especially important because most students have made their career decisions by the time they enter college.[18] More than 75 percent of minority high school students surveyed said they were fairly or very sure of their career decisions.[19] Furthermore, Becker and Park discovered that blacks were more likely than any other group to decide early on careers in journalism. Their study of college graduates who decided on journalism careers showed that 62.4 percent of blacks surveyed decided on journalism before college, compared to 50.4 percent of whites.[20] Dodd, et al, found that 50 percent of college journalism students surveyed made their career decisions while still in high school or elementary school, and an ASNE survey found that 39 percent of editors surveyed made their career choice before college.[21]

Methodology

To avoid the response bias suspected in previous studies of high school newspapers, a telephone questionnaire was selected as the survey instrument. Maryland high schools were selected to provide data for the Maryland Scholastic Press Association. The state roughly reflects the racial breakdown of the nation (29.4 percent minority population compared to 24.4 percent nationally).[22] Maryland also has a diverse demographic mix: a major city (Baltimore), white majority suburbs, black majority suburbs, white majority rural areas and black majority rural areas.

A list of public high schools was obtained from the Maryland State Department of Education. Vocational and special-needs schools were eliminated since the study was concerned with students who might go to college and eventually become journalists. The remaining 160

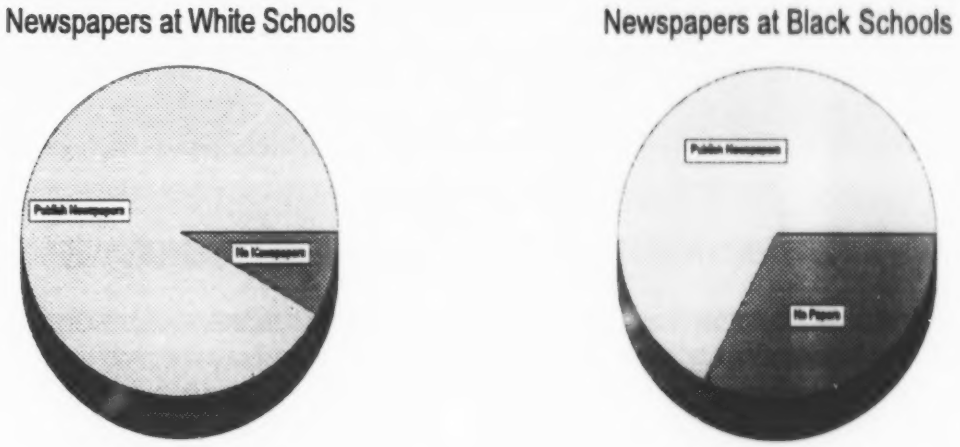
high schools became the study sample. A computer printout of the racial breakdowns of the 160 schools was obtained from the State Department of Education.

The survey was implemented in a two-stage process by graduate students in Dr. Katherine McAdams' research methods course at the University of Maryland during November and December 1995. First, school administrators were asked simply whether the school currently published a newspaper. With multiple follow-up telephone calls, a 100 percent response rate on the first section was eventually obtained. For schools that had newspapers (n=137), the newspaper adviser was contacted and interviewed. The response rate for the adviser section of the questionnaire was 76.6 percent (n=105). Advisers were asked about their newspapers (number of issues per year, number of pages per issue); their own backgrounds (race, gender, college degrees and majors, journalism field experience, journalism educational experience, years teaching); their experience as an adviser (years as adviser, compensation for advising the publication, satisfaction with their adviser's role on a 1-5 Likert scale); and their student-journalists (race and gender of top six masthead editors).

Findings

The study found that 85.6 percent of all 160 non-vocational, non-special needs public high schools in Maryland publish student newspapers (n=137). That closely reflects Dvorak's national findings of 83.1 percent. But the results show wide discrepancies strongly associated with race - specifically white and black. One hundred ten of the 120 white plurality schools published student newspapers (91.7 percent), while only 27 of the 40 black plurality schools had papers (67.5 percent). See Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: A Comparison of Schools By Race and Publication of Newspapers



The mean of whites at schools with newspapers was 66.3 percent, but only 43.3 percent at the schools without newspapers. The mean for blacks at schools with newspapers was just 26.2 percent, but was 54.2 percent at schools that did not publish a paper. (See Figure 3).

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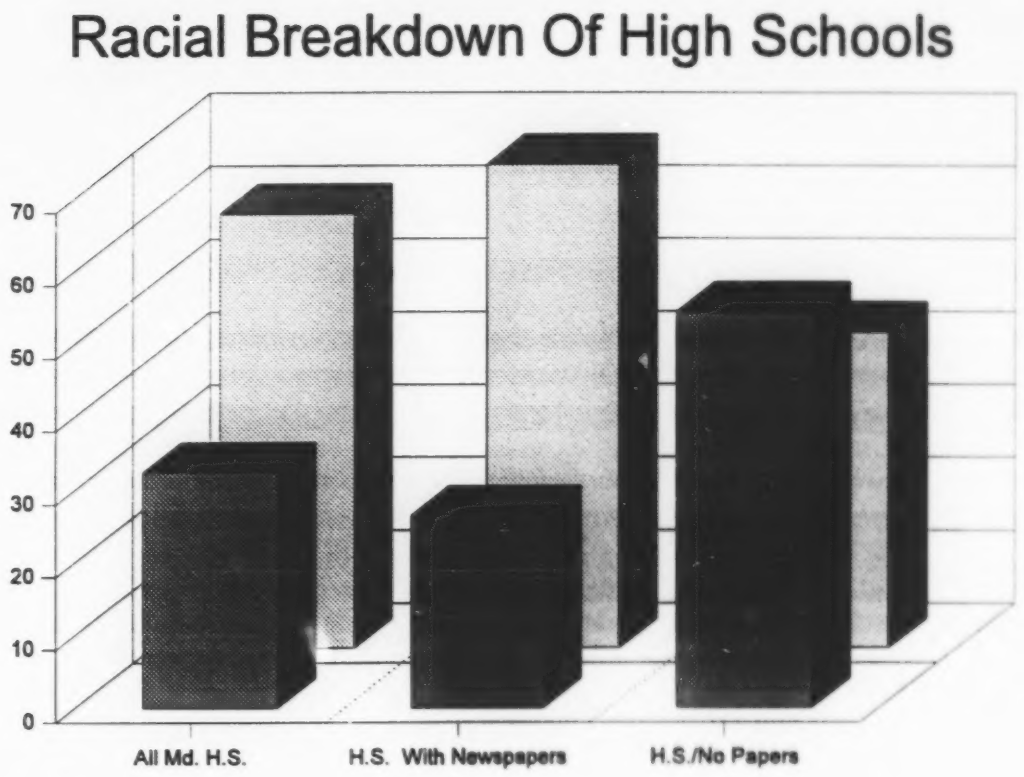
FIGURE 3



first bars=black students

second bars=white students

When race was broken down by white plurality schools and non-white plurality schools and compared to the nominal newspaper variable (yes or no), significance was found at the $p<.001$ level. A strong statistical association (.86957) was found with a lambda analysis of the percentage of black students at each school as the independent variable and the nominal newspaper category (yes or no) as the dependent variable. A similarly strong lambda association was found when the percentage of white students was the independent variable (.78261). No significant associations were found when Asian, Hispanic and Indian student percentages were tested.

The findings stand in stark contrast to Arnold's study, which concluded that 85 percent of inner-city high schools published student newspapers. This study found that more than half of Baltimore's 15 non-vocational, non-special needs high schools had no newspaper. And of the schools that did have newspapers, one published a single four-page edition annually and another published four one-page papers. The mean of pages published annually by Baltimore schools was 25.6, which is less than one-third the statewide mean of pages published annually. In Prince George's County, a densely populated, majority black area just out of the District of Columbia, six of the 14 high schools had no newspapers. See Table 2.

TABLE 2
Public High Schools in Maryland
By School Newspaper and Race

County	H.S. With Paper	H.S. No Paper	White Students (Pct.)	Black Students (Pct.)	Asian Students (Pct.)	Hispanic Students (Pct.)	Indian Students (Pct.)
Allegany	4	0	98.0	1.6	0.1	0.1	0.1
Arundel	10	2	79.8	16.1	2.3	1.2	0.1
Baltimre (city)	7	8	14.2	84.0	0.8	0.4	0.6
Baltimre (county)	20	0	72.6	22.5	3.6	1.1	0.2
Calvert	2	0	80.8	17.7	0.6	0.6	0.3
Caroline	2	0	78.6	20.5	0.2	0.6	0.0
Carroll	5	0	96.6	2.0	0.6	0.6	0.2
Cecil	5	0	93.4	5.0	0.8	0.7	0.1
Charles	3	2	74.9	21.8	1.6	1.1	0.6
Dorch.	2	0	59.6	39.3	0.4	0.6	0.1
Fredrck	6	1	90.3	6.6	1.5	1.5	0.1
Garrett	2	0	99.4	0.4	0.3	0.0	0.0
Harford	7	1	84.4	11.4	2.1	1.7	0.4
Howard	8	0	74.2	16.4	7.8	1.6	0.1
Kent	1	0	73.3	24.3	0.4	2.0	0.0

Mont.	21	0	55.3	18.4	14.4	11.6	0.2
P.G.	14	6	18.5	72.0	4.5	4.8	0.2
Q.Anne's	1	0	84.0	14.8	0.6	0.5	0.1
St Marys	3	0	80.9	16.0	1.7	1.2	0.2
Somerset	2	0	53.2	45.7	0.4	0.6	0.1
Talbot	1	1	75.0	23.9	0.6	0.5	0.0
Wash.	4	2	93.0	4.8	1.0	1.2	0.0
Wicom.	4	0	67.3	30.3	1.7	0.6	0.1
Worcest.	3	0	66.3	32.0	1.0	0.7	0.0
Totals	137	23	59.6	32.3	4.5	3.3	0.2

(source: Maryland State Department of Education, 1994-1995 enrollment, and telephone survey conducted November-December, 1995)

Among schools that had newspapers, racial disparities also were found. The mean of news pages per year (the product of issues per year and mean of pages per issue) was 84.8 at white plurality schools, compared to 70.2 at black plurality schools.

The leadership of the school newspapers also had a higher percentage of whites than would be expected. The study asked advisers to identify the race of their top six editors, as listed on the masthead of the most recent edition. These schools (n=97) had a white population mean of 69.7 percent, but 80 percent of the top editing positions were held by white students. Conversely, blacks made up 22.3 percent of the student population, but only 14.2 percent of the top newspaper positions.

There also are few same-race role model advisers for minority students. The study

showed that only 3.8 percent of the advisers surveyed (n=4) were minorities. That is similar to Dvorak's national findings of 4.7 percent.[23] Comparatively, 13.1 percent of all high school teachers are minorities.[24] The survey also showed that only 8.6 percent of the Maryland advisers majored in journalism and 60 percent never took a journalism course. Seventy-seven percent never had any professional journalism experience.

Discussion

In recent years and with increasing fervor, the newspaper industry has been stepping up its efforts to diversify newsrooms to make them look as diverse as the country. The efforts are genuine, largely because of economic realities: newspapers' potential audience is growing more diverse, and in order to capture that growing market papers need reporters and editors who bring those backgrounds to the news-making process. Yet it seems the efforts are muted at least in part by a rather small pool of people of color who are interested in journalism careers. Editors seem more and more to be fighting over the same people. Following the Unity '94 conference in Atlanta, which for the first time joined together the four major ethnic journalism groups (National Association of Black Journalists, National Association of Hispanic Journalists, Asian American Journalists Association and the Native American Journalists Association), recruiting editors spent the next six months counting how many new minority journalists they hired away from other papers and how many of their own minority staffers they lost to competitors. And the problem is especially large for smaller newspapers that have to lure journalists to their small towns with fewer dollars. Forty-five percent of all U.S. dailies still do not have any minorities on their staffs.[25]

The newspaper industry has not ignored the potential of recruiting potential journalists from the high school ranks. There are numerous workshops and seminars for minority high school journalists around the country. The Dow Jones Newspaper Fund has been sponsoring workshops for high school and college journalism teachers at historically black schools since 1964.[26] The Detroit Free Press publishes a page from local high school newspapers each week, and The Freedom Forum has a journalist-in-residence in the District of Columbia public school system. But such activist newspaper programs are the exception rather than the rule. Newspaper companies have spent most of their time and energy on professional-level and, secondarily, college-level recruiting of minorities.

Those efforts, however, have done and will continue to do little to expand the pool of aspiring journalists in minority communities. A partnership of local newspapers, journalism schools and philanthropic organizations could do just that by creating top-flight newspapers in minority high schools around the country and establishing journalism school scholarships for the best of those students.

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21. Dodd, et al. "High School Journalism Experiences Influence Career Choices."

22. 1990 U.S. Census.

23. Dvorak, *Journalism Kids Do Better*, 90-91.

24. Dvorak, *Journalism Kids Do Better*, 90.

26. Foote, "Minority, Total Newsroom Employment Shows Slow Growth, 1994 Survey Says."

27. Mary Arnold, "When It All Began: Journalism Minority Recruiting & High School Students," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (Montreal, Aug. 5-9, 1992).